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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIJING 004216

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: PRC/BURMA: MORE ON SOE WIN VISIT AND BEIJING'S
RELATIONS WITH RANGOON

Classified By: Political External Unit Chief Edgard Kagan. Reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) PRC Premier Wen Jiabao told Burmese PM Soe Win that China hopes Burma will move forward with national, political and ethnic reconciliation, according to MFA Asian Affairs Department Division Director for Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos Chen Dehai. Chen first denied that this was a new message before acknowledging that it marked the first time Beijing referred to the need for national and political reconciliation in such direct terms, though he was unsure whether Soe really understood the message. China wants Burma to quickly achieve real progress on national reconciliation and economic development but is firm that this should be done internally. Chen admitted that besides Beijing's interest in stable borders, China has important strategic concerns in Burma. Contacts at the Malaysia, Singapore and Philippine Embassies agreed, with Singapore particularly concerned about China using Burma as a staging ground to project military power. Our Malaysian Embassy contact said ASEAN is considering expelling Burma but is concerned about China's reaction. Citing the lack of consensus within ASEAN, Chen downplayed the possibility of ASEAN taking serious action against Burma while admitting to being perplexed at Rangoon's refusal to allow an ASEAN delegation to visit. Chen also discussed VFM Wu's management style and personality, saying Wu is willing to take risks because he is planning on retiring at the end of 2006. End Summary.

Consultations with EAP/MLS

2. (C) On March 3 Poloffs met over a working lunch with MFA Asian Affairs Department Division Director Chen Dehai who is responsible Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Poloff expressed appreciation for the MFA agreeing to the February 13 consultations on Burma with EAP/MLS Deputy Director Rapson. Recognizing that the discussions were frank and positive, Chen reported that it had been difficult for the MFA to reach a decision on the meeting, citing Premier Soe Win's arrival on the following day and the unprecedented nature of the consultations. Our request quickly climbed up the MFA chain, Chen continued, finally reaching VFM Wu Dawei, who immediately gave his blessing. Chen said the PRC did not tell Premier Soe Win about the consultations, but would not hesitate to brief the Burmese government if asked.

Premier Wen's Message to Premier Soe Win

¶3. (C) Chen at first rejected the idea that the Premier Wen's public usage of "national reconciliation" was new, saying Premier Wen had used this wording as well as "ethnic reconciliation" in the past. When pressed, however, Chen admitted that Premier Wen referred to "political reconciliation" in addition to "national and ethnic reconciliation" during his meetings with Premier Soe Win, though the PRC official media only reported the latter two. He went on to say that PRC officials have been moving to this language over the past few years but that Soe's visit may have been the first time that Beijing publicized these comments. Chen was unsure whether PM Soe actually noticed the subtle shift in China's stance or message in any case.

More Details on Premier Soe Win's Visit

¶4. (C) Chen said it was noteworthy that Senior General Than Shwe and various ministers saw Premier Soe Win off at the airport and welcomed him when he returned from China, showing the importance of the trip and the bilateral relationship to Burma. The trips to Xi'an, the capital of twelve Chinese dynasties, and Shenzhen, a booming city just twenty five years old, were purposely planned to show Burma China's 5000 year history as well as its modern economic achievements as a result of economic reform and opening.

Different Paths to Same Goal

¶5. (C) Chen contended that the China, the United States and most of the world share similar goals for Burma, with the

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main disagreement being over the path to the objectives. China wants Burma to move quickly down the seven-step road map, make real progress on national reconciliation and achieve economic development in order to build a stable and prosperous society. Burma's neighbors and the international community should encourage Burma and create an environment conducive for Burma to internally solve its problems and achieve these goals, argued Chen.

¶6. (C) Chen contended that the situation in Burma is not a major pressing issue for Burma's neighbors, who feel the issues will be solved with time. This is not the case for the United States whose main goal is to spread democracy now, Chen claimed. Poloffs pointed out that ASEAN, India and other nations can see that the lives of the Burmese people are getting worse while those in all nations in the region are improving. Cross-border issues of narcotics trade, infectious diseases and trafficking in person originating in Burma have a regional and global impact. A democratic Burma that incorporates the various sectors of society and ethnic groups into the government would be better far better equipped to establish stable and peaceful political control over the whole country, generate economic growth and make progress in solving the problems that spill over beyond Burma's borders.

NLD Gets No Respect and ASSK Has No Experience

¶7. (C) Commenting on the February 12 proposal by the NLD to acknowledge the junta as the transitional government if the junta agrees to convene the People's Parliament according to the results of the 1990 election, Chen said there is no chance that the regime will ever take any NLD proposal seriously because the ruling regime has no respect for the NLD or ASSK. Contrasting ASSK to former Indonesian President Megawati and current Philippines President Arroyo, all daughters of former national leaders, Chen said ASSK was only three or four years old when her father General Aung San died and therefore does not have the same experience growing

up in the "halls of power." No one in Burma believes she has the ability to govern the country, Chen claimed. Poloffs pointed out that the United States is not demanding ASSK become President but does consider her continued detainment a clear symbol of the lack of political and human rights in Burma. Releasing ASSK from house arrest would allow the regime to show that it is serious about addressing the political issues facing Burma.

Frustration Over the Move to Pyinmana

18. (C) Chen said the move of the capital continues to be an annoyance. The PRC Ambassador to Rangoon recently objected to an instruction to meet with the Burmese Foreign Minister in Pyinmana because "he did not want to spend a over a full day of travel and an overnight stay just to have a ten minute meeting." China has no plans to shift its Embassy to Pyinmana until it is clearer whether the move will really be permanent, according to Chen. Instead, Beijing is planning to open eventually a small office in Pyinmana, although Chen lamented that it is difficult to find anyone at the minister or minister-counselor level who is available and willing to be posted there.

Burma's Strategic Position

19. (C) Chen acknowledged that besides the interest in maintaining stability on its border, China also sees Burma's energy resources and Andaman Sea ports as strategically important. Chen said Burma recognizes this as well, saying that Premier Soe Win called attention to Burma's position between India and China during his dinner with Premier Wen. As for the proposed pipeline from Yunnan through Burma to the gas reserves off Burma's west coast, Chen discounted this as an agreement between Yunnan Province and Burma and noted that China is not pushing for action because of concerns about political, security and economic instability in Burma. China does not consider India to be a competitor in Burma or in the region, declared Chen, saying China is actively seeking better relations with India.

110. (C) During a separate meeting, Singapore Embassy Political Officer Patrick Lim agreed that Burma is important

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economically to China as a potential source of energy and a key trading partner with Yunnan Province. The pipeline, however, has become a bit of a "pipedream" since in reality there are many obstacles, including difficult terrain, political and economic instability and expensive adjustments to China's domestic pipeline network to accommodate a feed from Burma. Strategically, China wants access to ports on the Andaman Sea, Lim continued, not only for trade, but also as a possible staging ground and basing location for aircraft, warships and troops. If a road and railway were built alongside the pipeline it would allow China to base troops along the road and deliver supplies to Chinese naval vessels using Burmese west coast ports. Lim said this potential increase in China's ability to project power in the region is a key concern in Singapore's long-term strategic thinking.

ASEAN and Burma: Perspective from Beijing Embassies

111. (C) Malaysian Embassy Counselor Shublee Othman told Poloff that there has been no progress on the planned Malaysia FM-led ASEAN delegation visit to Burma. If there is no movement soon, Malaysia will invite the Burmese Prime Minister to Malaysia and convey a clear message of ASEAN's displeasure. Calling the ouster of former Premier Khen Nyut "a last straw," Shublee said ASEAN is "fed-up" with Burma and is seriously considering expelling Burma from ASEAN because of the lack of positive change. While noting that expelling

Burma would take a long time, partially due to ASEAN's need to "save face," Shublee said ASEAN is very concerned about how China would react to an ASEAN expulsion of Burma is beginning to test the waters in with Beijing.

¶12. (C) Embassy contacts at the Philippines and Singapore embassies say there is no serious movement to expel ASEAN. Philippines Embassy Minister and Consul General Jaime Ledda said the stronger voice of ASEAN as a whole during the 2005 ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur and the Chairman's Statement expressing concern about the situation in Burma has satisfied those that were most vocal behind the scenes in calling for expulsion. Singapore Political Officer Lim said ASEAN would be loath to lose the Burma's strategic position between China and India, though ASEAN is clearly losing patience with Burma and will continue to send strong messages of displeasure at the lack of real political change and economic development. Both Lim and Ledda agreed that even if ASEAN were to take some steps against Burma, China would not come out forcefully against ASEAN consensus, although Beijing would probably publicly support Burma.

¶13. (C) Chen was not surprised by the inclusion of a statement critical of Burma in the ASEAN Chairman's statement since ASEAN has been voicing frustration with the slow pace of change in Burma. ASEAN is unlikely to expel Burma, Chen said, citing the lack of consensus within ASEAN, with the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia advocating a harder line towards Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam being more sympathetic and Thailand and Brunei fence-sitting. Chen said Burma's refusal to receive the ASEAN delegation to be lead by Malaysia FM Hamid is perplexing. One reason might be that the delegation composition is unclear, with Burma probably ready to accept a delegation from a single country but not one consisting of members from multiple ASEAN states because it would seem like ASEAN was lecturing Burma, which would make the regime "not feel very good."

Chen on VFM Wu

¶14. (C) Chen called VFM Wu a "crazy" man because he is so active and aggressive, but is not hard to work for. Chen claimed to have a very good relationship with Wu, saying he freely challenges the VFM, whether in the office or on the golf course, which Wu appreciates. Wu is serious about encouraging dialogue with the United States on any topic, telling his subordinates that it is important for China to be able to explain its position with confidence. Chen said Wu calls himself "a rabbit's tail" (i.e. about to disappear) because he is retiring at the end of 2006. Wu is therefore unconstrained by career aspirations or what others think and just wants to move the ball down the road, according to Chen.

Noting Wu's role in the Six-Party Talks, Chen reported Wu as saying that he had been given "extra power" by the central authorities during the September 2005 round "in order to get

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the job done."

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